



A family snapshot shows government scientist Frank R. Olson with his young son, Eric.



"I want to feel we did what we could do to find out" what happened.

—Eric Olson

Digging for New Evidence

Scientist's Death Linked to CIA Tests of LSD

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By Brian Moar
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FREDERICK, Md., June 2—The body of Frank R. Olson, a government biochemist who plunged to his death in 1953 after unwittingly taking LSD in a CIA experiment, was exhumed today and handed over to forensic scientists trying to find out whether he was murdered.

Olson's son, Eric, a Frederick psychologist, stood by with members of the scientific team this morning as the concrete burial vault was hoisted from a hillside grave at Frederick Memorial Park. The dark wooden coffin was removed from the asphalt-sealed vault, wrapped in black vinyl and loaded into a van.

Eric Olson, 49, said he had been haunted by inconsistencies in government accounts of his father's death, and he expressed hope that his father's body would unlock the

secrets that he believes have been kept for four decades.

"I don't know if we're going to find out what happened to my father, but I want to feel we did what we could do to find out," he said. "I was only 9 years old when he died, and it was an overwhelming shock for me and something from which, in a lot of ways, I've never recovered."

Frank Olson plummeted from a 13th-floor window at the Hotel Statler in New York in the early morning hours of Nov. 28, 1953, and authorities labeled his death an apparent suicide. The family did not learn until 1975 that Olson, a civilian scientist working on top-secret germ warfare projects at Camp Detrick, Md., had been subjected to an LSD test nine days earlier.

In 1976, the government paid Olson's family \$750,000 to settle claims that the CIA was responsible for his suicide. But new evidence

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Scientist's 'Suicide' in 1953 To Get New Round of Tests

EXHUME, From D1

showing foul play might lead to new legal action, Eric Olson said.

CIA spokesman Dave Christian, calling Olson's death "a tragic event," said exhaustive investigations into the role of agency employees "indicated no reasons whatsoever to suspect that homicide was involved."

Frank Olson's body was taken to a police laboratory in Hagerstown, Md., this morning and will be examined for a month by a team of investigators led by James E. Starrs, a George Washington University professor of law and forensic sciences. Starrs has conducted similar investigations into the deaths of the parents of Lizzie Borden and assassinated Louisiana Sen. Huey P. Long.

The investigators will test for drugs and toxins, document bone fractures and use other modern techniques to test official explanations of Olson's death. A final report could be released within a month.

"We certainly expect to find what the nature of the injuries were that he suffered when he went out the window," Starrs said. "Hopefully we'll also find out whether he suffered any injuries before he went out the window, which might be attributable to . . . foul play. If we find nothing [in toxicology examinations], then there's nothing that could have been found, I assure you of that."

Olson said he and his brother, Nils, 45, decided to have the tests performed as they were transferring the body to the cemetery where their mother was buried last summer.

Olson said his father's body was well preserved. "They said the condition of the body was such that were none of the tests they could not perform," Olson said.

The autopsy performed at the New York medical examiner's office in 1953 was "very cursory" and included no X-rays or graphs cataloging Olson's injuries.

"The doctor was misled. He was told that it was an out-and-out suicide," Starrs said. "If he had known there was something more sinister, I'm sure he would have gone much further than he did."

In 1975, the CIA accidentally released a file to the Rockefeller Commission, which was investigating allegedly improper and illegal CIA activities in the United States. The file detailed the death of an unnamed scientist who jumped to his death after being given LSD, a drug that can cause many hours of hallucinations.

The family obtained CIA documents detailing the events leading to Frank Olson's death. But instead of answering questions, Olson said, the documents were riddled with deletions and inconsistencies.

After learning that he had been given LSD without his knowledge, Olson returned to his home despondent and told his wife that he had made a terrible mistake and wanted to quit his job. A short time later, he was whisked away to New York to meet with an allergist who was supposed to be knowledgeable in diagnosing LSD-related behavioral aberrations, Starrs said.

Two nights before Olson died, he escaped from his hotel, threw away his wallet and wandered the streets of New York. He was found the next morning sitting in the hotel lobby.

Eric Olson now asks why his father's CIA escorts would have placed him on an upper floor of the hotel, knowing he was despondent, and then allowed him to roam the streets. And after he died, Eric Olson asked, why did CIA documents make no reference to the fact that Frank Olson had become a security risk because of his reaction to the LSD?

One of the most troubling pieces of the puzzle, Eric Olson said, is a conversation a hotel operator reported overhearing minutes after his father died. Instead of calling for help, the operator said, the man in



BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST

Workers raise vault with body of Frank Olson from Frederick, Md., grave.

Olson's room called a number on Long Island.

"Well, he's gone," Olson's CIA escort reportedly said. "That's too bad," the other man replied before both hung up.

"I never had the opinion that he jumped from that window," said Armond Pastore, the night manager at the Hotel Statler on that morning in 1953. "Being in the hotel business my whole life, I never heard of anybody jumping through a closed window with the shade pulled down. Nobody I've worked with ever knew of somebody killing himself like that."

Pastore, now 75 and living in Melbourne, Fla., said he has been haunted by the death for 40 years.

"I remember the whole thing like it was yesterday, clear as a picture. He was still breathing and I leaned down real close to him and asked him his name, and he was looking straight at me.

"He was trying very hard to speak, but I guess his jaw was broken or something, so all he could do was kind of mumble. I never forgot that look in his eyes; he definitely had a message he was trying to tell me, but you could only guess what it was."